
**Performance Levels and Cut Scores for the Comprehensive English Language
Learners Assessment (CELLA)**

The Background:

Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires states to adopt an English language proficiency assessment for limited English proficient (LEP) students. The assessment must measure a student's English ability in four domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. School districts must annually assess LEP students using the adopted assessment. States are responsible for holding districts accountable for LEP students making progress in English proficiency as measured by the English language proficiency test.

The state of Tennessee has adopted the Comprehensive English Language Learners Assessment (CELLA) by Educational Testing Service (ETS). This assessment measures the required four domains across grade levels K – 12. The CELLA has four purposes:

1. To assess the English proficiency of non-native speakers of English to determine whether they are LEP and eligible for English as a Second Language (ESL) services;
2. To determine the program placement of students in ESL classes based on their proficiency levels;
3. To provide diagnostic information to educators on the progress individual students are making on specific ESL standards; and,
4. To hold districts accountable as required under Title III for the progress their LEP students are making in achieving English proficiency in the four domains.

The Department assembled a task force comprised of ESL educators to participate in a standard setting session conducted by ETS to determine the CELLA cut scores for the English proficiency levels at each grade level from kindergarten through 12th. The attached document specifies the cut scores recommended by ETS as a result of the standard setting session.

The attached document also defines criteria necessary for LEP students to exit ESL services. LEP students must score advanced on at least two of the three assessment areas: reading, writing, and oral skills (speaking and listening) on the grade level CELLA assessment to be reclassified as English proficient and eligible to be exited from ESL services.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends approval of the cut scores determining levels of English proficiency on the CELLA on final reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.

**Tennessee Department of Education
Office of Federal Programs
English as a Second Language Program – Title III**

**COMPREHENSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING ASSESSMENT (CELLA)
RECOMMENDED CUT SCORES**

Overview of the CELLA

Tennessee Department of Education has adopted the use of the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA), an Educational Testing Service (ETS) product, to assess the English language proficiency of English Language Learners (ELL) as required by Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This assessment was developed to align with Tennessee's approved English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum standards, which are available on the Department's website at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/fedprog/doc/fpeslcurriculum.pdf>. These standards are divided into four domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The CELLA provides schools with proficiency level in three areas: reading, writing, and oral skills (speaking and listening).

In addition to testing the ESL standards as required by Title III, this assessment determines whether ELLs meet proficiency performance standards to meet exit requirements from the ESL program, as required by the State Board of Education.

Test Format

There are four levels of the CELLA based on grade span: **A** (K-2), **B** (3-5), **C** (6-8), and **D** (9-12). The cut scores are based on these four grade level spans (A, B, C, or D), GRADES (K – 8 and high school), and the three assessed proficiency domains (reading, writing, and oral skills). Beginner ELLs that are in grade 3 through high school may take lower forms of the reading and writing CELLA to accurately determine their proficiency in these two domains.

There are two forms of the CELLA: Form A (2005) and Form B (2006). Both forms are equated so that the cut scores for each level, grade, and proficiency domain are the same on both forms of the test. Form A was originally used in Spring 2005. Districts have copies of Form A to use to screen newly arrived Non-English language background students to determine whether they qualify for ESL services, and if so, their level of English proficiency. Form B was administered in Spring 2006 as a secure assessment and used to determine student proficiency at the end of the school year.

Proficiency Level Descriptors

The following descriptors represent the basis for the cut scores. As the preliminary CELLA cut scores do not determine the difference between beginner/high beginner proficiency levels and intermediate/high intermediate proficiency levels, these decisions are determined by each individual district for placement purposes of students in its local ESL program.

- * **Beginner:** Students at beginner proficiency have virtually no functional ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing English. They are often new arrivals.

Beginner level students may go through a “silent period” as a stage of normal second language acquisition development. These are initial literacy skills.

- * **High Beginner:** Students at high beginner proficiency are beginning to understand language and use it in a limited capacity. Typically, they memorize words and phrases and can comprehend and utilize language that they have been taught. The curriculum focuses on applying literacy skills to the development of new knowledge. In second language acquisition, social language usually precedes academic language development.
- * **Intermediate:** Students at intermediate proficiency are able to understand most oral language pertaining to familiar topics but have difficulty comprehending and using academic vocabulary. Their speech and writing are basic and contain frequent errors. Social language ability can be misinterpreted for more advanced ability in academic English. grade level academic content skills are still in development. The curricular focus is on advancing applications of literacy skills for the development of new knowledge.
- * **High Intermediate:** Students at high intermediate proficiency are able to function well in most everyday situations but still require academic language support. They may have difficulty understanding text beyond the literal level. They often make errors in structure and idiomatic language. The curricular focus is on more advanced applications of literacy skills.
- * **Advanced:** Students at the advanced level of proficiency can handle most personal, social and academic language. Idioms and structure are frequently still problematic. Complicated literary and academic texts may require use of a dictionary when the language and context are unfamiliar. The ESL curricular focus is based on literacy skills necessary for success in a grade level classroom.

Please note: Language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing develops at different rates. Therefore, there are frequently different levels of proficiency across the different skills.

Determination of Preliminary CELLA Cut Scores for Proficiency Levels

Under the direction of ETS, the Department assembled teams of ESL educators from across the state to participate in a bookmarking process to recommend cut scores for each form of the test at one grade level. ETS used statistical techniques to guide that process by presenting impact data and interpolating cut scores for the other grades in the grade level span. This process is described in the document “Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment (CELLA) Tennessee Standard Setting Results,” which is available on the Department’s website at <http://www.state.tn.us/education/fedprog/fpeslresources.shtml>.

ESL Program Exit Criteria

To exit the ESL program and to be reclassified as an ELL Transitional Year 1 Student (referred to as a T1), an ELL must test **Advanced** on **at least two of the three** assessed domains: Reading, Writing, and Oral Skills. T1 ELLs are exited from the

ESL Program, mainstreamed fully in the regular classroom, and are monitored by the district for success. If they are successful during their first year of transition, the district must continue to monitor them for progress for one more school year. These second year ELLs are classified as Transitional Year 2 Students (T2). When a T2 ELL demonstrates success in the regular classroom without ESL support, he/she is reclassified as Fluent English Proficient and is not identified as ELL or limited English proficient (LEP). T1, T2, and Fluent English Proficient students do not take the CELLA. They only participate in the regular TCAP assessments administered at their assigned grade levels.

If T1 or T2 ELLs are not successful in the regular classroom without ESL support, the district must continue to classify them as ELL and provide the ESL support necessary for them to fully access the regular classroom.

ESL Program Screening Criteria

For newly enrolled Non-English Language Background students who do not have student records from previous school districts indicating their English language proficiency status, districts must assess these students' English language proficiency. To do this, districts should use Form A of the CELLA at the student's previous grade level and the corresponding cut score.

Students who test below the **Advanced** level on the oral skills section of the CELLA are automatically classified as ELL and must receive ESL services. The reading and writing sections of the CELLA, Form A, do not need to be administered. Students who test **Advanced** on the oral skills test must be administered the corresponding reading and writing sections of Form A of the CELLA. If a student tests **Advanced** on **two of the three** assessed domains: Reading, Writing, and Oral Skills; they may be classified as Fluent English proficient and mainstreamed into the regular classroom without ESL support. Newly enrolled Non-English Language Background Kindergarten students should be tested with Form A (2005) and determination of proficiency status should be made at the district level based on the results.

PRELIMINARY CELLA CUT SCORES
KINDERGARTEN – GRADE 2
FORM A

ORAL SKILLS

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	KINDERGARTEN	GRADE 1	GRADE 2
Advanced	666 or above	692 or above	704 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	636-665	664-691	672-703
Beginning Advanced Beginning	635 or below	663 or below	671 or below

READING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	KINDERGARTEN	GRADE 1	GRADE 2
Advanced	617 or above	701 or above	709 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	544-616	645-700	665-708
Beginning Advanced Beginning	543 or below	644 or below	664 or below

WRITING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	KINDERGARTEN	GRADE 1	GRADE 2
Advanced	668 or above	705 or above	709 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	636-667	677-704	686-708
Beginning Advanced Beginning	635 or below	676 or below	685 or below

PRELIMINARY CELLA CUT SCORES
GRADES 3 – 5
FORM B

ORAL SKILLS

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5
Advanced	716 or above	723 or above	724 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	687-715	688-722	691-723
Beginning Advanced Beginning	686 or below	687 or below	690 or below

READING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5
Advanced	715 or above	721 or above	727 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	696-714	708-720	711-726
Advanced Beginning	695 or below	707 or below	710 or below
Beginning	Took Form A	Took Form A	Took Form A

WRITING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5
Advanced	718 or above	723 or above	727 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	684-717	700-722	705-726
Advanced Beginning	683 or below	699 or below	704 or below
Beginning	Took Form A	Took Form A	Took Form A

PRELIMINARY CELLA CUT SCORES
GRADES 6 – 8
FORM C

ORAL SKILLS

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	GRADE 6	GRADE 7	GRADE 8
Advanced	723 or above	727 or above	732 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	681-722	684-726	686-731
Beginning Advanced Beginning	680 or below	683 or below	685 or below

READING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	GRADE 6	GRADE 7	GRADE 8
Advanced	741 or above	747 or above	751 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	724-740	730-746	735-750
Advanced Beginning	723 or below	729 or below	734 or below
Beginning	Took Form A or B	Took Form A or B	Took Form A or B

WRITING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	GRADE 6	GRADE 7	GRADE 8
Advanced	740 or above	743 or above	745 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	718-739	721-742	722-744
Advanced Beginning	717 or below	720 or below	721 or below
Beginning	Took Form A or B	Took Form A or B	Took Form A or B

PRELIMINARY CELLA CUT SCORES
GRADES 9 -12 (HIGH SCHOOL)
FORM D

ORAL SKILLS

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	High School (GRADES 9 -12)
Advanced	739 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	684-738
High Beginner/Beginner	683 or below

READING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	High School (GRADES-12)
Advanced	761 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	750-760
High Beginner	749 or below
Beginner	Took Form A, B, or C

WRITING

PROFICIENCY LEVEL	High School (GRADES 9 -12)
Advanced	738 or above
Intermediate High Intermediate	705-737
High Beginner	704 or below
Beginner	Took Form A, B, or C

ESL EDUCATORS ON CELLA BOOKMARKING TASK FORCE

NAME	SCHOOL DISTRICT
Deborah Gentry	Putnam County
Jeanette Veile	Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Todd Goforth	Shelby County
Linda Smith	Shelby County
Mary Kahler	Memphis City Schools
Mary Olivier	Knox County
Sharon Hargrove	Warren County
Kathy Butler	Sumner County
Bob Houston	Montgomery County
Hila Hill	Knox County
Rosella Morton	Trousdale County
Alice Brown	Putnam County
Janette Lanier	Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Sharon Marlin	Sumner County
Jessica Szalacinski	Sumner County
Patricia Seyb	Williamson County
Ruby Hinrichs	Hawkins County
JaNelda Walker	Robertson County
Sandy Still	Bedford County
Diane Dogan	Shelby County
Debbie Moore	Bradley County
Rosa Terese Wolford	Montgomery County
Binney Stumpf	Putnam County
Cheryl Roby	Montgomery County
Heidi Casper	Montgomery County
Carol Moling	Memphis City Schools
Orba Allred	Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
Paul deLeon	Knox County
Luciana Balla	Memphis City Schools
Jean LaForest	Maryville City/Blount County
Cynthia Ward	Anderson County
Jill Merritt	Rutherford County
Nona Hall	Rutherford County
Diane Mackey	Rutherford County
Barbara Dickerson	Rutherford County
Dale Mays	Memphis City Schools
Stacey Miller	Rutherford County
Edith Barry	Hamilton County
Vanessa Saucedo	Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools
DeAnna Osborne	Rogersville City Schools
Joseph Whinery	Williamson County
Susan Fisch Good	Loudon County
Jean McMahan	Maury County
Elizabeth Holder	Montgomery County